

“I NEVER THOUGHT IT WOULD HAPPEN HERE”: WHITE PRIVILEGE AND  
ASSUMPTIONS OF SAFETY

A Thesis

by

KAY SARAI VARELA

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Chair of Committee,	Sarah N. Gatson
Co-Chair of Committee,	Wendy Leo Moore
Committee Members,	Phia Salter
Head of Department,	Jane Sell

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## ABSTRACT

Criminology and media scholars over the last two decades convincingly argue that crime is one of the major social problems of this era. Racialized constructions of safety and space, however, continue to be the dominant paradigm through which crime is viewed and the hypervigilance of people of color legitimized. I argue that depictions of white communities as pure, homogenous, and calm spaces permit and facilitate whites' tendency to link danger and violence to people of color, which not only reinforces existing stereotypes that associate people of color with the dangerous side of the safety continuum, but also harks back to a history when white space was violently protected and its isolation legally sanctioned. Using 155 newspaper articles taken from four Chicago area newspapers from January 2008 to January 2013 (*The Chicago Tribune*, *The Chicago Defender*, *La Raza Chicago*, and *The Daily Herald*), I conduct a structurally contextualized critical discourse analysis and engage several different categories of frames, particularly in three areas: 1) neighborhood contextualization; 2) safety concern of the article; and 3) how the incident being reported on is described and understood in terms of locality. My analysis highlights the white supremacist logic found and upheld in newspaper discourse; a discourse that focuses on white normative standards of safety while also structuring the way in which people and communities of color experience safety. As such, my analysis indicates demonstrates discourse surrounding safety and crime indicate an often unnoticed privilege—the privilege of

being able to presume safety—that is denied to people and communities of color and almost guaranteed to whites and white communities.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Criminology scholars over the last two decades have convincingly argued that fear of crime is becoming a major social problem. They have demonstrated that the ramifications of fear of crime go far beyond personal anxiety to include: fragmentation of neighborhoods and communities; increased residential segregation when wealthy individuals move to increase their own personal security; a reduction in the appeal of rehabilitative penal policies; an increase in “tough on crime” policies; increases in incarceration rates; an increased amount of vigilante groups; and numerous mental health issues that result from high levels of fear of crime (Hale 1996; Cheurprakobkit 2006; Fishman 1978; Pain 2000; Pager 2007).

However, research on fear of crime, safety, and risk assessment has primarily been quantitative, most conducted through the use of surveys (Carvalho and Lewis 2003; examples include Jackson 2011 and Cheurprakobkit 2006). As Carvalho and Lewis (2003) point out, “Although this approach has provided valuable insight...it has limited our ability to think beyond the variables commonly used” resulting in little being known about the different processes surrounding safety and fear of crime. (pg. 779). Similarly, research on fear of crime is largely based on the experiences of the white majority and constructed from a white perspective with little attention given to the experiences of people of color and how race, class, gender, and sexuality shape fear and safety discourse. As a result, this research will contribute to existing literature by examining the way in which race as a lived experience influences constructions of safety allowing

social scientists to assess and more readily identify how security as a public good is unequally distributed throughout the United States.

The findings produced by this study will help social scientists better understand the multidimensional and intersectional nature of security, fear of crime, and the continued importance of race in determining the life chances of individuals. Because this study examines how race as a lived experiences influences perceptions of personal safety, this research will allow social scientists to better understand how health and well-being is influenced by fear of crime anxiety. Similarly, because fear of crime research continues to catch the attention of politicians and policy makers, the forthcoming study takes an important role in defining how America views crime and victimization, especially as punitive polices remain a politically controversial issue.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW: FEAR OF CRIME

Since the 1960s, fear of crime has been one of the fastest growing areas of academic research and the target of many policy initiatives. Hale (1996) notes that, “In the last thirty years over two hundred articles, conference papers, monographs and books have been written on some aspect or other of fear of crime” (79). In order to gain a more accurate picture of the causes and factors influencing this rise in fear of crime, researchers have proposed numerous explanations and theoretical frameworks to supplement the empirical results generally obtained through mass surveys (such as the British Crime Survey) in order to provide information on beliefs, attitudes, perceptions, and responses to fear of crime found among the general public.

### **Fear of Crime and Victimization and Risk Perception**

The social science conceptualization of fear of criminal victimization has focused on the extent to which individuals express fear of particular crimes in comparison to other crimes, often referred to as “sensitivity to risk” or “risk assessment.” This research has focused on individual-level attitudes and experiences, mostly through the use of mass surveys.

First investigated by Warr (1987), empirical data suggests that sensitivity to risk is patterned along the lines of age<sup>1</sup>, gender<sup>2</sup>, previous victimization and race. These

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<sup>1</sup> Though not related to the present study, age has been a prominent figure in fear of crime literature, particularly when considering victimization. The general consensus among researchers is that as people grow older, they tend to become more fearful of crime (though the elderly are less likely than any other age group to be victims of crime). Fattah and Sacco (1989) provide excellent reviews of fear of crime among the elderly.

studies generally suggest that women, the elderly and racial and ethnic minorities are most fearful presumably because these are the groups who have higher levels of physical or social vulnerability (Garofalo 1979). Defining sensitivity to risk as “the relation between fear of a particular offense--say, armed robbery, rape, or burglary--and the perceived risk of that offense (i.e., the subjective probability that it will occur),” Warr (1987) noted that “perceived risk and sensitivity to risk act in conjunction to produce fear” (pg. 30, 45). Since then, researchers such as Jackson (2011) have used Warr’s “sensitivity to risk” model to consistently argue that victimization and perceived risk continue to be one of the strongest predictors of fear (see also Warr 1990; Jackson 2008).

However, studies using this argument have by and large produced mixed and conflicting evidence about the relationship between fear, risk perception, and victimization. Roundtree and Land (1996), for example, note that questions such as

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<sup>2</sup> Like age, gender and its relation to fear of crime are not directly related to the present study. But like age, gender has consistently been found to be a strong predictor of fear of crime, though several scholars have noted that this could be the result of cultural constraints on the ability of men to admit they fear crime. As Hale (1996) notes, “Much research has focused on resolving the question why, when according to both published crime figures and victimisation surveys, they are less likely than men to be victimized, women express greater fear of crime than men do” (pg. 96). Existing literature offers two explanations for this paradox. First, researchers argue that official statistics and crime surveys do not adequately capture the extent of women’s victimization and do not take domestic abuse and violent sexual assault into consideration, making high levels of fear among women seem irrational (Pain 2000; Sacco 1990; Stanko 1990b; Pain 1997). The second explanation stresses female vulnerability. Here feminist criminologists suggest that the higher levels of fear generally found among women result from socialization processes that lead to gendered differences in behavior and reactions to crime among men and women (Stanko 1990b; Pain 1997; Sacco 1990; Pain 2000). However, Stanko and Hobdell (1993) have argued, “The assumed reticence of men, and the unproblematic acceptance of it by researchers, turns the focus of attention...almost exclusively to women...most of the violence men experience, especially at the hands of other men, has been excluded from analysis....The state’s use of violence against men, particularly working-class and marginalized men, has been documented....yet rarely classified as assault” (pg. 402). Similarly, gender researchers argue that “hegemonic masculinity” has excluded the victimization experiences not only of men of color, but also gay men who are often the victims of sexual and violent crimes (Gordon and Riger 1988, Stanko 1990b).

“How safe is your neighborhood from crime?” and “Do you think that people in this neighborhood are safe inside their homes at night/during the day time?” are meant to elicit assessments of general safety but ask respondents to make assessments about hypothetical situations (Roundree and Land 1996; see also Skogan and Maxfield 1981). Similarly, Skogan and Maxfield (1981) note that empirical evidence suggests a stronger link between indirect victimization and fear of crime.<sup>3</sup>

### **Fear of Crime and Residential Location**

As researchers came to the realization that fear for crime is not directly related to experiences of victimization, studies exploring a “spatial element” to fear of crime began to appear, arguing that where respondents’ live also influence levels of fear of crime. This has resulted in vast amounts of empirical evidence suggesting that inner city residents have higher levels of fear of crime than those who live in suburbs, small towns, or rural areas, as confirmed by both quantitative and qualitative research (Van der Wurff and Stringer, 1988; Valentine, 1990; Pain, 1997). As a result, researchers have been inclined to suggest that crime is becoming one of the most important factors shaping individuals sense of place (Pain 2000).

Among the arguments looking to explain fear of crime, some researchers have suggested that feelings of one’s ability to control one’s neighborhood, amount of community resources and the impact of rapid growth in otherwise small towns may explain fear of crime (Krannich et al. 1985; Krannich et al. 1989). Several other researchers have argued that the visibility of physical and social decay can explain fear

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<sup>3</sup> For a more nuanced discussion on risk assessment, see Wolf (2007) and Jackson (2011).



of crime in inner-city neighborhoods. Generally referred to as the “broken windows” argument, researchers here assert that “incivilities” are often interpreted as cues of dangerous situations, resulting in higher levels of fear of crime. Respondents often cite graffiti, teenagers on street corners, drunks, trash, noisy neighbors, loud parties, and abandoned houses and buildings as indicators that the neighborhood is in decline and thus unpredictable (Stinchcombe et al. 1980; Skogan and Maxfield 1981; Wilson and Kelling 1982). Along these same lines, several other researchers have incorporated a “crime as everyday life” argument (Garland 1996; Beck 1992), arguing that for some respondents crime is no longer an unusual event but is instead an ordinary component of modern life. Their studies suggest, through both quantitative and qualitative methods, that experiences with crime are fluid, embedded and shaped by daily routines and expectations that change depending on an individuals’ social geography (Pain 1997; Pain 2000; Holloway and Jefferson 1997; Evans et al. 1996).

As Pain (2000) argues, however, fear, at the neighborhood level, is situated and depends on sets of social relations (particularly those of race, age, or class). “Situatenedness of fear,” she contends, impacts people’s sense of community and security because “being local” and being labeled “outside” a certain community impacts individual levels of fear of crime. In this sense, fear can be understood as being focused on strangers entering a given community and results in privatized, protected and defensive communities who aim to keep outsiders out (Taylor 1995; Taylor 1996; Pain 2000).

## The Effects of Media on Fear of Crime

Researchers also lack consensus when investigating the impact of media on fear of crime. Smith (1986) notes: "...studies of the mass media and of interpersonal communications give some insight into the spread of information about crime ... (but) reveal little, however, about the processes by which mere awareness about crime is translated into fear and concern" (pg. 128). Studies considering the effect of newspapers, radio, and television have argued that fear is not rooted in reality but is instead the result of sensational, highly selective, and dramatized news stories that are nothing more than journalists' imaginations (Fishman 1978; Hall et al. 1978). Given that for most people, media is the major source of crime, researchers continue to argue that it is not unreasonable to assume that media plays a central role in shaping perceptions of crime and fear of crime itself (Hale 1996). As Smith (1986) notes, however, "...this is not to argue that the press *determines* public opinion but rather to argue that it 'sets the agenda' which frames such opinion" (pg. 119; original italics). Regardless, empirical evidence on the impact of the media upon fear is also mixed.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Three studies are important to note here. First, Heath (1984) found that those respondents who read crime news covering "grizzly" or "bizarre" events in other cities reported lower levels of fear and often felt safe, noting that their own neighborhood was safer than the one discussed in the news. Second, Liska and Baccaglini (1990) expand on Heath's (1984) work naming the phenomenon first observed by Heath "feeling safe by comparison." Both studies suggest that news reports of local crime events (especially those that were particularly heinous or thought to be random) increased levels of fear among respondents, regardless of location. Third, Winkel and Vrij's (1990) findings suggest that geographic location is not enough when predicting the media's effect on fear levels. The authors specify that it is necessary to also consider respondents' perception of the level of similarity between their own neighborhood and the one in the crime report implying that it is local, rather than national, crime news reporting that most influences levels of fear. They argue, "...the concept of stimulus similarity as a prerequisite to heightened fear in reaction to mass media crime reporting should not be interpreted in a one dimensional way. Stimulus similarity relates to the degree to which the reader identifies with the described victim, to the degree to

## Race and Class

Unlike gender and age, race and class have not received much attention from criminologists investigating fear of crime. In fact, most often, results concerning race and class are lumped together and are rarely explained on their own as factors influencing fear of crime. However, whatever little empirical evidence is available is telling. Based on existing empirical evidence (which focuses mainly on American minorities), race and class appear to significantly influence fear of crime levels. Research has demonstrated that racial and ethnic minorities as well as low-income individuals tend to report higher levels of fear of crime than whites and those with high incomes (Balyea and Zingraff 1988; Biderman *et al.* 1967; Braungart *et al.* 1980; Clemente and Kleinman 1977; Eve and Eve 1984; Lee 1983; Liska *et al.* 1988; Ortega and Myles 1987; Parker and Ray 1990; Parker *et al.* 1993; Skogan and Maxfield 1981; Wiltz 1982). The explanations as to why this is the case are varied.

Some researchers suggest that because people of color are more likely to live in inner cities or other urban environments, they are also at greater risk of becoming victims, making them also most likely to be fearful. This argument suggests that high levels of crime and incivilities are a given that go hand-in-hand with inner city residence (Mayhew 1989; Belyea and Zingraff 1988; Braungart *et al.* 1980). Others argue, however, that contextual factors such as dominant stereotypes attributing certain social identifiers (in this case, skin color, phenotype, etc.) to criminal behavior produce higher

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which one's neighbourhood is seen to bear resemblance to the described locale, and to the extent to which the described form of crime is similar to the form of crime one fears" (pg. 264).

levels of fear (Lea and Young, 1984; Merry, 1981; Taub *et al.*, 1984; Smith, 1986; Chiricos *et al.*, 1997). What results are higher levels of fear among whites but also among people of color, who have internalized the same racialized stereotypes (Hough 1995; Cooper and Pomeyie 1988; Bowes *et al.* 1990). Still others argue that lower incomes and education levels (or an overall lack of access to material and social resources), not only hinder the ability of racial and ethnic minorities to cope and protect themselves from crime but also, inadvertently result in higher levels of crime (Clemente and Kleinman 1977; Eve and Eve 1984; Skogan and Maxfield 1981).

Interestingly enough, the small amount of researchers that do mention racism (both institutional and individual) as a mitigating factor in levels of fear rarely go into detail as to how exactly racism can influence fear of crime (Biderman *et al.* 1967; Braungart *et al.* 1980; Bowes *et al.* 1990). Two notable exceptions are Kern (2005) in her study of white women in Toronto and Sasson (1995) in his study of “crime talk” where he presents a “racist system” frame. Through the use of small focus groups, Kern’s (2005) findings suggest that confidence, a sense of belonging, and the ability to distance oneself from more dangerous areas are indicators of the white privilege these women have. She argues that these women are able to feel safe and are free from fear of violence of because of the “general invisibility,” material reality, and subjective experience afforded to them by their whiteness. Taking a different path, Sasson (1995), suggests that a “racist system” frame is rooted in the labeling of youth of color as delinquents and criminals. This labeling affects individuals’ of color and their own self-concept in addition to influencing how others behave and interact with said individuals.

He argues, however, this frame is not generally a cause of crime but is instead reflected in interactions with police, the judicial system, and political institutions, such as the use phrases like “police brutality,” “illegal searches and seizures,” and “racial double-standards”. It is unfortunate, however, that he only considers this frame a “secondary framework” stating that such a designation is “based upon an empirical observation rather than a normative judgment or deductive inference” (Sasson 1995, pg. 105).

### **Measurement Debate and an Increase in Qualitative Studies**

There is considerable debate about the exact definition and the most accurate way to measure or quantify fear of crime. Most researchers have used a single item indicator of fear, usually a variation of the following: “How safe do you feel being out alone in your neighborhood after dark?” (Hale 1996; pg. 86). Unfortunately, as Ferraro and LaGrange (1987) argue, these forms of measurement are incredibly limited because they fail to take into consideration emotional reactions, psychological stressors, anxiety, or even how individual respondents make judgments about the likelihood that they will be victims of crime (see also Garofalo 1979).

Although disagreement stems from a variety areas, it is the focus on quantitative methods that has lead qualitative researchers to argue that this reliance on mass survey research has in fact, limited their ability to see how fear of crime can change and develop (Carvalho and Lewis 2003). As Farrall *et al.* (1997) note,

Respondents may well simply report *generalized* levels of fear of crime, which may not adequately represent their actual emotions on any one occasion. Even where just one crime is concerned, a respondent's feelings about that crime may vary greatly with numerous other variables

(e.g. social, geographical and temporal dimensions), none of which is addressed (pg. 661; original italics).

These measures create inconsistencies in reported results making the measure of fear of crime “grossly sensitive” to the kind of questions being asked (see also Fattah 1993; Farrall et al. 1997) . As a result, the 1990s saw an increase in the amount of qualitative work investigating fear of crime. Taken together, these criticisms imply that survey questionnaires present an unintentionally narrow insight into fear of crime among the general population, ultimately neglecting its multi-faceted nature. As Hale (1996) notes, “More broadly, is 'fear of crime' simply measuring fear of crime or, perhaps in addition, some other attribute which might be better characterised as 'insecurity with modern living', 'quality of life', 'perception of disorder' or 'urban unease'?” (pg. 84).

### **Discourse Analysis and Fear of Crime**

In addition to Sasson’s (1995) study on “crime talk” (discussed above), there are only two other studies that have used discourse analysis methods to investigate fear of crime (Tulloch 2003; Tulloch 2004). Both studies attempt to bridge the gap between quantitative and qualitative methodologies in an attempt to account for the complexity and varieties inherent in studies on fear of crime by considering the functionality of language in constructing and legitimizing systems of meaning.

In her first study, Tulloch (2003) findings highlight the variability and inconsistency associated with feelings on fear of crime. While she is still able to highlight four positions related to constructions of threat and power, she concludes, however, that discourses mainly focus on issues of individual agency and controllability. She notes that

Participant positions constructed around issues of agency and control cannot be reduced to dimensions of individual personality or the product of social variables....Rather social constructions of gender, age, race and socio-economic status are all involved in the discursive construction of power relations within which participant positions around crime are developed (pg. 475).

In her second study, Tulloch (2004) shifts her focus to parents' worry about the possibilities of their children falling victim to violent crime. Her findings confirm Warr and Ellison's (2000) and suggest that parents express high levels of anxiety about the likelihood of their children becoming the victims of crime. She notes,

Parents draw on the public discourses circulating around childhood, risk and parenthood in accounting for their responses to the question of worry about criminal threat to their children...Parents justify their fears for their young children most commonly through hypothetical worst-case scenarios. The legitimacy of this rhetorical device, often unsupported by specific evidence, relies on an assumed shared understanding of the dangers facing children (pg. 375).

### III. THE STUDY

#### **Methodology**

##### *Research Questions*

This study is concerned with four research questions:

(*Q*<sub>1</sub>) How are assumptions of safety facilitated by white privilege—both in terms of material privilege and subjective identity privilege?

(*Q*<sub>2</sub>) How is the *safety discursive frame* constructed in newspaper reports and how it is deployed in reports about crime?

(*Q*<sub>3</sub>) How does the safety discursive frame function as a *racialized structure of opportunity*? How does the present racial hierarchy affect the safety discursive frame?

(*Q*<sub>4</sub>) How does white privilege function within the safety discursive frame?

##### *Data*

Newspaper reports were taken from four different publications from the greater Chicago-area: the *Chicago Tribune*; the *Daily Herald* (an Arlington Heights/suburb area newspaper); the *Chicago Defender* (an African American newspaper); and *La Raza* (a Spanish language/ Latino newspaper). These newspapers were chosen working under the assumption that news coverage and featured stories reflect the interests of and cater to target audiences (in this case, racial and ethnic groups). I analyzed stories featured in these four publications from January 2008 to January 2013. Table 9 in the appendix gives a brief synopsis of each publication and the amount of newspaper reports from each publication analyzed for use this study.

While in the initial stages of data collection, I noticed a pattern in each of these publications in the way in which safety is discussed and how it varies depending on which newspaper is publishing the story, but nonetheless all the outlets employ a



particular safety discursive frame. As a result, my focus here will be to highlight how the safety discursive frame functions as a mechanism that maintains and reproduces white privilege and racialized stereotypes of crime.

### *The City of Chicago and Crime*

The city of Chicago, Illinois serves as an excellent location for the present study for several reasons. First, Chicago is the third largest city in the United States and very racially and ethnically diverse. The 2010 U.S. Census putting its population at just under 2.7 million residents. Table 7 in the appendix shows the city's racial composition, as reported by the 2010 Census.

Second, metro Chicago continues to be one of the most residentially segregated cities in the United States. Figure 1 in the appendix demonstrates the residential patterns by racial group of greater metropolitan Chicago. Although residential segregation across all racial groups continues to decline, segregation levels in Chicago continue to be some of the highest even among comparable cities. Hall et al (2010) and Krysan (2009) report that black-white segregation is 4th highest and Latino-white segregation is 11<sup>th</sup> highest in the United States, neither changing much since 2000. Of all racial groups in Chicago, Blacks continue to be the most segregated with nearly two-thirds (compared to one-fifth of whites and less than half of Latinos) living within Chicago city limits (Hall et al. 2010; Krysan 2009).

Third, Chicago has a long reputation of being a high-crime city. In addition to organized crime and the beer wars during prohibition, the city has seen a consistent rise in its violent crime rates in since the late 1960s (Ruth 2005). Table 8 shows a breakdown

of crime rates, as reported by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, for Metro Chicago including its surrounding suburbs. Additionally, Figures 2 and 3 in the appendix show crime rates and safety ratings by neighborhood for Chicago and some of its suburbs.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This research project explores the way in which assumptions of safety are facilitated by white privilege, both material privilege and what Kern (2005) refers to as “subjective identity privilege.” Unfortunately, there is no theoretical framework for research on security, safety, crime and race. As a result, this research pieces together and extends several theoretical concepts from race and gender scholarship and uses them as guiding principles within this study. This research incorporates the concepts of *white spatial imaginary* (Lipsitz 2008), and *ideological code* (Smith 1993), which I argue are useful in demonstrating how what I refer to as the safety discursive frame functions as a racialized structure of opportunity, specifically as a form of white privilege.

In this research, I work with Huey’s (2012) definition of security and extend it to my discussion on safety. Huey (2012) states:

I use the term security to denote a *relative* status of physical and ontological freedom from both immediate and potential criminal threats, this definition includes two key components: physical safety (crimes against the person) and the safety of one’s personal belongings (crimes against property)...In order to have a sense of ontological security, or a sense of inner peace...one must be reasonably free from the burden of constant wariness and anxiety over future threat (pg. 11; original italics).

I use this definition for several reasons. On the one hand, this definition allows me to consider the complex ways in which individuals experience safety, while on the other

hand allowing me demonstrate “the fact that security as a public good is not problematic in and of itself, but rather that the problem lies in its distribution” (Huey 2011, pg. 20). I suggest that discourse surrounding safety and crime represent an important and underdeveloped area for interrogating the mechanisms facilitating white privilege in access to safety, while simultaneously denying safety to people of color.

Additionally, along with Stanko (1990a), I intentionally use the word safety throughout this study<sup>5</sup>, instead of fear of crime because, “*Safety implies a level of managing danger from a position of equality*. Safety is a positive action. It demands that the seeker of safety is an autonomous individual capable of positive choices, not having to choose between unpalatable options (Stanko 1990a, pg. 180; italics added). The use of the word safety allows me to consider the systemic nature of white privilege by not obscuring the patterns of domination and subordination surrounding safety and security as it does not limit the analysis to only consider individual level behavior and ideology (Wildman and Davis, 2000; Moore 2013b). In other words, the term safety places the responsibility on the overall structure under which individuals live to demonstrate that varying levels of safety are the result of institutional forces, not individual choice of residential location. Though not discussed at length by Stanko (1990a) and Huey (2012), the intentional use of the word safety allows for an analysis that considers how varying social factors such gender, age, race, class, and sexuality function together to influence the discursive maneuvering surrounding crime and safety.

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<sup>5</sup> In line with Huey (2012), I will occasionally use safety and security interchangeably.

Central to this discussion the concept of racialized space. As Moore (2013b) notes, “racialized space is one of the mechanisms of racialized social systems that facilitates the reproduction of white power, privilege and wealth over generations.”<sup>6</sup> Although the concept of racialized space is not new to sociology, scholars continue to demonstrate that racialized space (particularly residential) spatially isolates people of color from the wealth and resources of white communities (Massey and Denton 2003; powell 1999; Kefalas 2003). As Moore (2008b) notes, “Residential segregation acts or enlarges many material privileges of economic opportunity, quality of life, power to influence actions and events, and convenience. At the same time, it obscures the fact of such privileges from many of their beneficiaries” (pg. 24).

### *The White Spatial Imaginary*

In his book, *How Racism Takes Place*, George Lipsitz (2011) argues that racial residential segregation gives white supremacist ideology concrete form suggesting that a “shameful history of white violence in northern cities in defense of white neighborhoods remains a protected secret in our society” (26). Within what he refers to as the “white spatial imaginary,” Lipsitz (2011) argues:

The white spatial imaginary idealizes “pure” and homogenous spaces, controlled environments, and predictable patterns of design and behavior. It seeks to hide social problems rather than solve them. . . . This imaginary does not emerge simply or directly from the embodied identities of people who are white. It is inscribed in the physical contours or the places where we live, work and play and it is bolstered by financial rewards for whiteness (pg. 29).

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<sup>6</sup> Unpublished manuscript—page number not available.

He suggests that exclusivity forms the foundational logic of the white spatial imaginary, producing “hostile privatism” and “defensive localism” further allowing the continued salience of racialized space (pg. 11). The white spatial imaginary is not only embedded ideologically in the subjective identities of the residents of white places but it is also embedded in the physical contours of the spaces people call home. Behind the guise of protecting neighborhood profitability and promoting security, Lipsitz argues that the white spatial imaginary continues to create “unjust geographies of opportunity” (2011, pg. 28). What makes the white spatial imaginary an institutional mechanism is the simple fact that every white person benefits from the protection of white spaces, regardless of whether or not they directly contribute to protecting the white spaces they inhabit (Lipsitz 2011).

Ironically, in its ideological protection of its own boundaries, the white spatial imaginary creates the very conditions that it fears and removes itself from. In an attempt to protect the quality of local schools; seek protection from environmental degradation; keep jobs and businesses local; and maintain the existing quality of social services; white protection of white space inadvertently creates spaces adversarial spaces—those characterized by lack of employment opportunities; abandoned or deteriorating buildings; toxic environmental hazards; overcrowded and underfunded schools; and *violent crime*. Racialized space and its subsequent protection therefore often functions as a mechanism of racial oppression and facilitates not only material white privilege but also ideological white privilege (Young 2002). In what she terms “white institutional space,” Moore (2008) notes that racialized space “functions as a central element of

institutional racism” (pg. 25) reinforcing the prevailing racial hierarchy and functioning as a tool through which white privilege, power, and wealth is reproduced (Moore 2008; Lipsitz 2011). As a result, discourse surrounding crime, safety, and good and bad neighborhoods are distorted, as these notions are themselves racialized.

Using Lipsitz concept of the white spatial imaginary, I suggest that within the context of safety and security, the white spatial imaginary allows whites to spatially define what is safe and what is unsafe. This involves two factors: 1) white ability to claim and control residential space; and 2) white ability to distance threat.

Various areas of literature have previously suggested that feelings of safety are connected to white ability and desire to preserve and control the spaces in which they live (Kefalas 2003; Lipsitz 2011; Heath 1984; Kern 2005; Tulloch 2003; Donnelly 1988; Gubrium 1974; Riger et al. 1981). This ability, however, is linked to systems of racial privilege that make it possible for whites to psychologically and spatially claim the space in which they live (Kern 2005; Kefalas 2003). As Kern (2005) notes, “In relation to whiteness, I would argue that white privilege allows these women to feel more secure in their....identities, and be better able to challenge threats. In relation to urban space, confidence is related to familiarity with space claimed as home...privilege of confidence is a factor in feeling less fearful and actively claiming that space” (pg. 366).

Similarly, Heath (1984) suggests that individuals possess a general tendency to want to control over their physical and contextual environments. By having control or perceiving the ability to control, whites are able to convince themselves that the likelihood of falling victim to a violent crime is minimal. Though some whites will

readily admit that their white identity can't protect them completely from being victims of violent crime, white privilege protects whites from engaging crime as a daily and regular experience. (Heath 1984; Kern 2005). As a result, they perceive themselves are being largely safe from harm. As Tulloch (2003) notes, although other social factors may constrain individual positions, "...social constructions of gender, age, race, and socio-economic status are all involved in the discursive construction of power relations within which participant positions around crime are developed " (pg. 475). As such, I suggest that the white spatial imaginary is a mediating factor in allowing whites to claim space and feel confident in the assumption that their residential area is safe.

Second, I suggest that understandings of safety and threat are dependent on the ability to distance threat and conceptualize threat as something that occurs elsewhere (Kern 2005; Carvalho and Lewis 2006). Coupled with the ability to claim and control space, whites are able to legitimize a sense of security and safety through distancing—constructing violence as something that occurs only in “rougher” but far away neighborhoods (Heath 1984; Liska and Baccaglini 1990). Heath (1984) suggests that the ability to do this is mediated and made possible by the ability of onlookers to view themselves as being different from the victims of that crime.

Within the context of newspaper reporting, Liska and Baccaglini (1990) suggest that stories covering crime that occurred in one's own city or town are highly likely to produce fear. The authors' findings suggest that the inverse is also possible: if violent crimes reported in newspapers occur somewhere else, people tend to feel safe by comparison. I suggest that white privilege functions as a mediating factor in allowing

whites to assume they are at minimal risk of being victims of attacks that are similar in nature to those they often read about in newspaper reports. For people of color, however, crime occupies a central position in daily life.

### *Ideological Code*

Smith (1993) suggests that what she terms the *Standard North American Family (SNAF)* functions as an *ideological code*. She argues that ideological codes function similarly to genetic codes; they are

...a schema that replicates its organization in multiple and various sites...it is a constant generator of *procedures for selecting syntax, categories, and vocabulary in the writing of texts and the production of talk and for interpreting sentences*, written or spoken, ordered by it. An ideological code can generate the same order in widely different settings of talk or writing... (pg. 52; original italics).

This conception of an ideological code is beneficial for interrogating constructions of safety because newspaper accounts of crime employ a particular ideological which I call the *safety discursive frame*.

Police, the justice system, other government officials, the mass media, policy makers, and individuals themselves organize and construct the safety discursive frame. The safety discursive frame, as normalized by whites, is constructed as something that largely occurs in and is guaranteed to be present in affluent white suburban communities. Even though the safety discursive frame is not thought to be present in communities of color, it nonetheless structures how people of color talk about and experience safety. When phrases such as “safe,” “unsafe,” “dangerous,” and “crime ridden,” among others are used to describe residential spaces, the safety discursive frame



is at work through the use of these concepts, further creating “text-mediated social relations” (Smith 1993, pg. 62). Even when safety as idealized by whites is not the prevailing norm, the safety discursive frame still serves as the basic unit from which more complex forms are constructed and continue to operate, though largely outside of the consciousness of the writer.

Safety, as a result, presents itself as a racialized structure of opportunity that fails to acknowledge that the privilege of safe environments is generally only given to whites. Such a privilege may not be visible for whites but is often highly visible to people of color. As Kern (2005), notes, “....whiteness in general, can act as a blind spot that frequently prevents white people from seeing the realities of the lives of minoritized subjects” (pg. 368). Additionally, white privilege, coupled with the ability to claim space, allows whites to construct crime as something committed by the “dangerous other” thereby making room for and reinforcing the assumption that urban violence happens elsewhere.

Heath (1984) suggests that the worse the crime environment appears in areas far away, the safer the individual reader feels in her/his home environment. As such, because reading about urban violent crime in newspapers means reading about violent crime *elsewhere*, whites are able to believe that they are at minimal risk of crime and are unworried by the possibility of being the victim of a violent crime (Tulloch 2003; Tulloch 2004; Liska and Baccaglini 1990). The white spatial imaginary allows for tacit white norms and ideology about who commits crime, where it is committed, and who it affects to remain embedded in a racialized hierarchy. As a result, the safety discursive frame is based on an abstract concept of safety that confines racial analysis to micro-

level concern about the ability to avoid and cope with crime, rather than acknowledging that safety exists as a racialized structure of opportunity.

Of course, many could argue that crime also happens in predominantly white communities (for example, the recent shootings at Sandy Hook Elementary School). I argue that these however, are isolated events for whites and the fact that such occurrences remain rare for white communities further suppresses the possibility that safety may not always present even within white communities. Because of white spatial privilege, people of color are denied access to safe spaces, thereby not allowing us to make the same statement when discussing communities of color. Major criminal events like the Sandy Hook shootings shock the conscience of white America and the white spatial imaginary because they are a direct challenge to racialized space and assumptions about who crime is purported to affect.

After a major criminal event, whites discover (through these isolated events) what people of color have always known –the world is unsafe and violent crime can always happen. Thus, whites begin to experience what they previously took for granted would only happen in minority neighborhoods—violent crime. This leaves whites with a sense of spatial violation; the beliefs they previously held about the safety of their neighborhoods and the norms surrounding crime no longer exist. Lipsitz (2011) notes that the white spatial imaginary

...structures feelings as well as institutions....The suburb is not only an engine of self-interest, *but also a place that has come to be imbued with a particular moral value consistent with deeply rooted historical ideals and illusions.* Among dominant groups in the United States, socially shared moral geographies have long infused

places with implicit ethical assumptions about the proper forms of social connection and separation. (pg. 29; italics added)

Attention to the criminal victimization of people of color, however “requires attention to broad structural processes and acknowledgement of deeply unequal conditions and opportunities in society” (Lipsitz 2006; pg. 117). By examining the discourse surrounding safety and race, I suggest that safety functions as a form of white privilege and that newspaper media covering crime are an important sight for interrogating the mechanisms that facilitate white normativity and material privilege within the realm of safety.

#### **Analysis Procedure: Structurally Contextualized Critical Discourse Analysis**

In analyzing newspaper reports, I conduct what Moore (2013a) refers to as a *structurally contextualized critical discourse analysis* of reports concerned with the topics of crime and safety. This method, informed by both sociological theory and critical discourse analysis methods, “connects discourse and structure in the analysis phase” (Moore 2013a; pg. 4).

According to Moore (2013a), this analytical process includes three elements, which will be adapted to fit the purposes of this research study. In the first element of analysis, I will identify the frames used in crime and safety related newspaper reports. According to Moore (2013a), “A frame can be thought of as the logic that structures the boundaries and form of a process of communication” (pg. 4). In crime and safety related newspaper reports, the safety discursive frame is “the discursively produced logic map” created by the media in order to reinforce boundaries of what can be considered “safe”

(Moore 2013a; pg. 4). This includes the reporting of only those facts deemed relevant for further reinforcing the boundaries of the safety discursive frame, the manner in which the media reports those facts, and ultimately, the consequences that resulted from the reporting of said incident. A frame analysis is useful in that it allows me to look at both what is used in the media's frame and what is ultimately excluded from the frame and deemed irrelevant to the report. In the second element, I analyze the discursive tactics employed by media in order to explain and justify the use of the safety discursive frame. Here, I focus on the racial discourse, narratives, and racial ideology used by the media in order to further rationalize and normalize the broader framing of safety and crime issues. My analysis is therefore focused on how the media engages in racial meaning making concerning crime through the use of a particular racial ideology. In the third element, I conduct a critical evaluation of how the safety discursive frame used by the media "relates to and connects with the racialized practices, institutional arrangements, and structures that maintain white supremacy" (Moore 2013a; pg. 4).

My central focus is on eliciting how the safety discursive frame functions as an extension of the white spatial imaginary, furthering white privilege. I suggest that the safety discursive frame is situated within racial discourse and embedded within the prevailing racial hierarchy. As such, it not possible to fully understand the connection between safety and white privilege without considering how they are situated within and therefore reproduce and reinforce the prevailing U.S. racial structure.

#### IV. THE PROMINENCE OF THE SAFETY DISCURSIVE FRAME: HOW IS SAFETY ASSUMED?

In October 2009, the *Chicago Tribune* published “The Gauntlet”, a story in which *Tribune* reporters shadowed six teenagers from different public schools across the city in order to chronicle their daily trips to and from school. The piece began with the following:

Before they crack a textbook or enter school’s doors, most public high school students in Chicago have already taken their first test of the day. To make it to school, students crisscross streets carved up by gangs, board buses at chaotic bus stops and steer clear of particularly dangerous swaths of the neighborhood. Gangs, guns, and drugs stir neighborhood violence, *so routine* that many of the 116,000 high school students have grown numb to it (Azam 2009; italics added).

The story paints a rather grim picture of the environment in which Chicago public school students live. The *Tribune* ultimately demonstrates that despite the efforts of police, public school officials, and community members, violent crime continues to be a part of the every day life of students, their parents, their classmates, teachers and neighbors.

In contrast, less than a month earlier in September 2009, the *Tribune* also featured a piece titled “Violence, Fear Strike a Tiny Farm Town,” stating, “Fear found its way into this tiny central Illinois town of about 200 after the cold blooded slayings this week of five family members of the well-liked Gee family” (Shmadeke and Hood 2009). Shocked residents told the *Tribune* that, “Many residents don’t bother locking their doors at night” and “This just does not happen here; people are in total

shock”(Shmadeke and Hood 2009). The murders of the members of the Gee family resulted in responses like, “I’m scared to death, honestly....” (Shmadeke and Hood 2009). Unlike the “Gauntlet” story, the *Tribune* carefully demonstrated how this crime shattered residents’ beliefs that their town was by-and-large safe from violent crime. In doing so, however, the *Tribune* evoked the safety discursive frame and exploited deep-seated normative assumptions about safe and dangerous places, including the underwritten racial normative assumptions about crime and delinquency, to demonstrate that this is *not meant* to happen in a small suburban town.

The analysis of newspapers, while guided by a theoretical framework centered on the white spatial imaginary and the safety discursive frame, generated distinct categories regarding three areas: 1) neighborhood contextualization; 2) safety concern of the article; and 3) how the incident being reported on is described and understood in terms of locality. Definitions of category (hereafter referred to as “clusters”) are shown in Table 1 and 2.

Table 1 Neighborhood Clusters	
Frame	Definition
White/Suburban Neighborhood	Neighborhood is portrayed as quiet, calm, aesthetically pleasing and well-kept, exclusive, and costly to live in. Residents are described as trusting and well-composed. Tends to express having high levels of financial and community resources.

<b>Table 1</b> <b>Continued</b>	
Minority Neighborhood	Neighborhood is portrayed as lacking conventional social controls, aesthetically unpleasant with high levels of environmental decay, chaotic, with high levels of violent crime including murder, theft, gang and drug-related violence. Residents often express feelings of lack of control and no police or public official support. Tends to be subject to close surveillance by police.

<b>Table 2</b> <b>Locality of Crime Clusters</b>	
Frame	Definition
Locality 1	Criminal incident is discussed as a local neighborhood problem.
Locality 2	Criminal incident is discussed as having occurred in a non-local but similar neighborhood.
Locality 3	Criminal incident is discussed as having occurred in a non-local and non-similar neighborhood.
Locality 4	Criminal incident is local but feelings expressed are that violent crime is rare in this neighborhood.
Locality 5	Criminal incident is local but feelings expressed are that violent crime is ordinary and expected in this neighborhood.

As a result, the subsequent analysis engages these categories in order to interrogate the patterns of normative assumptions of space and safety found in these texts. This is done to identify commonalities in the discursive framing and maneuvering present in each story. As such, the analysis seeks to demonstrate how the safety discursive frame mediated by the white spatial imaginary, is the foundational structuring logic of these texts. As I will demonstrate, stories like those described above and the narratives they include are indicative of how white privilege and the safety discursive

frame continue to structure newspaper stories about occurrences of violent crime. In doing so, these stories obscure the material realities caused by the contemporary racial hierarchy facilitating white privilege within the context of safety.

The initial purpose of this study was to examine how print newspaper reports framed safety and exposure to violent crime in terms of ordinariness and rarity. As the analysis phase progressed, however, it became evident that the framing employed by each newspaper story was closely tied to perceptions and the subsequent framing of whichever neighborhood being discussed. As a result, it is difficult to make precisely distinguish which cluster any given newspaper story fits into, as these the components of each cluster commonly functioned hand-in-hand.

As I will demonstrate, rather than being isolated instances, these texts evoke the white spatial imaginary through their use of the safety discursive frame and as a result, function as a mechanism of white privilege. This serves two functions. First, these expressions indicate the continued salience of the safety discursive frame as an element that continues to privilege whites by allowing their conceptions and normative standards of safety to define the safety overall. As a result, whites are able to benefit from these conceptions of safety, further preserving assumptions of purity and homogeneity of the places in which they live. Second, these expressions reinforce the boundaries created by the safety discursive frame by structuring how whites as well as people of color talk about crime and safety. As such, these expressions facilitate and further reinforce the pathologization of communities of color. Because of the safety discursive frame, whites construct crime as a given component of communities of color and something that's far



away, allowing for the assumption that the area in which whites live is safe. These portrayals, rarely flattering, create an impression of chaos and danger based on countless amounts of intertextual images connecting crime with people of color. These texts, thus, need to be understood as a component of the contemporary racial system in order to understand how the safety discursive frame not only reinforces white privilege but also continues to disadvantage people of color. By focusing on individual communities, these seemingly neutral pieces of text obscure how vocabulary and language is being chosen and used to hide how institutional racism functions to reinforce the prevailing safety discursive frame.

### **The Violation of Safe White Space**

The white/suburban neighborhood frame is central in demonstrating how descriptions of these neighborhoods set the normative standard to which all other neighborhoods are compared. The white/suburban neighborhood frame is complex in how it presents itself in each story as because this frame is often accompanied by other statements discussing the following: level of trust in local police to maintain public safety; the availability of both financial and community level resources; and keeping “crime out.” For example, in September 2009, the Arlington Heights *Daily Herald* reported on the first murder to have occurred in Bannockburn, a small Illinois town of about 2,000 people. The *Daily Herald* wrote:

Tucked away in the north shore, Bannockburn is known for its million dollar homes with manicured lawns and quiet tree-lined streets. *It's a place where crime is rare.* So the residents of this posh southern lake town were surprised to learn Friday morning a man was found shot to

death on the brick driveway on a secluded cul de sac  
(Milkus 2009; italics added).

Published under the headline “Village Reports Its First Murder”, the *Daily Herald* framed safety as being clearly being connected to wealth. In doing so, the *Daily Herald* protected the safety discursive frame while simultaneously protecting the assumptions held by residents of this predominantly white town:<sup>7</sup> that crime of this nature is a rare occurrence for them. The *Daily Herald* achieves this by allowing the white spatial imaginary to structure text that reinforces the racialized constructions of safe and dangerous neighborhoods. Additionally, through its own discursive maneuvering, the *Daily Herald* legitimizes residents’ responses to the occurrence of an unexpected violent crime. One longtime resident told the *Herald*, “This is supposed to be so prestige and serene. We’re supposed to be above that” (Milkus 2009). By including these particular responses, the *Daily Herald* allowed residents to preserve their own entitlement to safe spaces. In effect, the text highlights the boundaries of the safety discursive frame and recognizes that this white space has been violated by the occurrence of a violent crime.

Descriptions such as those published by both the *Daily Herald* and the *Chicago Tribune* are not isolated but instead are representative of a structured pattern that looks to purposely idealize white residential spaces. Table 3 below graphically demonstrates the frequency of the white/suburban neighborhood cluster in each of the four newspapers.

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<sup>7</sup> According to the 2010 U.S. Census, Bannockburn Village in Illinois is 87.54% White. Source: [http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/community\\_facts.xhtml](http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/community_facts.xhtml)

<b>Table 3</b> <b>White/Suburban Neighborhood Cluster in Newspaper Sample</b>				
	<b>Daily Herald</b>	<b>Chicago Tribune</b>	<b>Chicago Defender</b>	<b>La Raza</b>
White/Suburban Neighborhood	67%	27%	3%	26%

Similarly, it was often the case that the white/suburban neighborhood cluster was accompanied by Locality 2 and Locality 4 clusters. Table 4 graphically demonstrates the frequency of these two locality clusters in each of the four newspapers.

<b>Table 4</b> <b>Locality Clusters in Newspaper Sample (White Neighborhoods)</b>				
	<b>Daily Herald</b>	<b>Chicago Tribune</b>	<b>Chicago Defender</b>	<b>La Raza</b>
Locality 2	79%	3%	9%	24%
Locality 4	97%	13%	6%	6%

These utterances and descriptions are not a neutral choice of words but are instead meant to contribute to the social construction of white spaces as safe by engaging in discursive framing that fits the prevailing structural script. These visuals feature white homogenous, relatively quiet communities with high levels of social cohesion and low levels of criminal activity, which ultimately suggest that this is a “good” community not deserving of whatever criminal travesty has occurred. The discursive framers (the writers, reporters, editors, and even those who are interviewed for each story) report each story through a recognizable pattern that reflects the safety discursive frame. In

other words, through the white spatial imaginary, newspaper discourse of violent crime in white suburban communities place these communities in an adversarial position to communities of color, implying that white space is always safe and Black/Latino space is dangerous. These catchy images, which are clearly meant to evoke feelings of spatial violation as facilitated by the white spatial imaginary, are grossly misleading about the spatial dimension of violent crime. By framing white communities as pure, calm, and peaceful spaces, they imply that violent crime will *never* happen in and will *always* be a rare occurrence in white neighborhoods (Wolf 2007; Smith 1993; Kern 2005).

Similarly, utterances such as, “You see these things on TV and you never think it’s going to be you” (Hitzeman 2011) and, “My carefree attitude has changed. My sense of safety has been affected” (Lester 2008) are appeals to reclaim a geographical privilege that has been violated. The framing used by both newspapers protects prevailing white assumptions that their own likelihood of becoming victims of crime is low. Flowing from this primary assumption, each utterance looks to reinforce the white spatial imaginary and protect the safety discursive frame as the defining authority on what space is safe and dangerous. Specifically, the framing facilitates the belief that the occurrence of violent crime in white affluent communities is and always will be rare. These reports abide by the central tenants of the white spatial imaginary that white space is pure, homogenous, and safe, and should remain that way. As a result, these reports ultimately reinforce white assumptions that as long as they live in predominantly white communities, they are safe from violent crime (Lipsitz 2011; Heath 1984; Williams and Dickinson 1993).

Furthermore, these utterances hark back to a history when white space was violently protected and its isolation legally sanctioned (Kefalas 2003; Baca 2010). As Baca (2010) notes, any threat disrupting white communities demands a display of power by whites, generally including violence, as a way to restore white communities to peaceful and calm places. Whiteness, during times of crisis, needs protection and demands that the boundaries (both literal in residential areas and ideological in protecting white privilege) be protected and reinforced against any threat presented by people of color (Baca 2010). As a result, these utterances legitimize and create consensus on the appropriateness of the use of force to protect white space from future instances of violent crime (Kefalas 2003; Baca 2010). For example, in an anonymous opinion piece published by *Daily Herald* in July 2012 regarding the gun control laws being proposed in Illinois at the time, the author stated,

Given the existence of mental illness, criminal gangs, and various ideologies of violence, what is a rational design for our gun control laws, how do we preserve the right of self-defense and the rights of the sportsmen while complicating the plans of the violent? (Anonymous 2012).

Implicit in this statement is the ideology of white entitlement to claim and protect white space. In instances such as these, media framing quite literally functions to legitimize residential segregation as form of self-preservation. By framing this want to reclaim space after a violent criminal incident in terms of “right of self-defense,” the media allows whites to remain justified in their want to claim the space in which they live (Kefalas 2003). Additionally, through this sort of framing, whites literally invoke and enforce the institutional privilege afforded to them by the prevailing racial hierarchy

because the media facilitates the protection of white interests through its discursive framing (Entman and Rojecki 2000).

### **The Safety Discursive Frame in Communities of Color: Contrasting Discourses**

In April 2008, the *Chicago Defender* (a historically Black newspaper) published a story that contained the following:

In Chicago, Blacks have a near monopoly on killing and being killed....what you have is guys that run four or five blocks and they'll kill each other over who's going to control those blocks....If Black communities remain on the fringe, they will break from society and become islands of anarchy....areas where lawlessness prevails....police won't go into these areas and they'll be ruled by small militias [and] gangs (Noelliste 2008; original brackets).

Published under the headline “Black Communities some of the City’s Deadliest,” this story carried with it the subtle notion that violent crime is almost synonymous with communities of color and demonstrates the normative racial skew that undercuts newspaper reports on violent crime. Without explicitly using the words “safe” or “dangerous” (anywhere in the article), this story portrays urban America (of color) as being uncontrollable and in decline. Ultimately, these discursive frames result from and reinforce long existing normative assumptions about crime and people of color, resulting in the discursive reification of the safety discursive frame (Pager 2009). In doing so, they indicate that these characteristics have come to be expected of communities of color and might even be a permanent characteristic of them.

Unlike the white/suburban neighborhood cluster, the minority neighborhood cluster was featured with more prominence in three of the four newspapers used for this

study. However, stories that fit this cluster included a pattern of narratives that constructed these dangerous spaces in a very precise way and detailed these residential spaces as places where the majority of residents abused social services and lived in public housing; that were in various stages of decay with plenty of abandoned or burnt down buildings and houses; where gang and drug violence had more authority than local police; and as places with almost no financial resources with which to combat crime. Intertwined with these common themes were expressions that often cited a lack of control over the neighborhood situation; a need to adapt because structural macro-level change was not going to happen; and feelings that police and local government officials were not concerned about the needs of residents of these neighborhoods and their safety. Table 5 graphically demonstrates the percentage of stories in this sample that fit the minority neighborhood cluster.

<b>Table 5</b>				
<b>Minority Neighborhood Cluster in Newspaper Sample</b>				
	<b>Daily Herald</b>	<b>Chicago Tribune</b>	<b>Chicago Defender</b>	<b>La Raza</b>
Minority Neighborhood	14%	61%	82%	56%

Newspaper reports of violent crime are powerful. Not only are they powerful because they possess the ability to engage in discursive meaning making, but also because they can construct as well as reinforce concepts based on racialized skewed constructions of social reality. Newspaper reports depict life in communities of color as being pervaded by violence and danger and legitimize whites' tendency to link danger

and violence to people of color. As a result, crime reporting frames danger parallel to the historical and contemporary racial hierarchy, ultimately reinforcing existing stereotypes that associate people of color with the dangerous side of the safety continuum (Entman and Rojecki 2000).

By describing communities of color as places where “too many of our neighborhoods are not safe, with gang and drug violence taking too much of a toll...” (Ransom 2008) or “I wonder how many more teens will be murdered coming home from school...it is not unreasonable for a parent to assume that they will see their child alive after they get home from work....” (Hutson 2009), the safety discursive frame operates as a set of white norms, choosing vocabulary in a very precise way. Through these utterances, newspaper reports are able to position communities of color (and by default, people of color) as the protagonists; the causes of increases in violent crime; and opposite of what is considered safe, intact, and predictable. In doing so, this type of discourse allows white assumptions about what is dangerous to become the key structuring devices in the logic of these texts, even with no mention or comparison to white communities being made.

It was often the case that the minority neighborhood cluster was accompanied by Locality 1 and Locality 5 clusters. Table 6 graphically demonstrates the amount of stories that fit these two locality clusters in each of the four newspapers.



<b>Table 6</b> <b>Locality Clusters in Newspaper Sample (Minority Neighborhoods)</b>				
	<b>Daily Herald</b>	<b>Chicago Tribune</b>	<b>Chicago Defender</b>	<b>La Raza</b>
Locality 1	34%	82%	79%	26%
Locality 5	3%	76%	91%	74%

For example, in an October 2009 piece from the *Chicago Defender* included the following

Chicago is now ground zero in the war against youth violence. All it was a video of a young man being beaten to death on the streets, saturating the internet and finding among its viewers even the president of the United States. Certainly children have been killed before, and unfortunately, there will be children killed after, but even now we have national and even international scrutiny on the crime problem that is vexing Chicago. *Now*, it's a big deal (Ransom 2009; italics added).

Implicit in this text is the notion that crime, social disruption, and deviance are part of everyday life for people of color living in Chicago. That this was published in a newspaper with a predominantly African American readership is no coincidence. The author expresses distaste for violent crime and the frequency with which it happens but at the same time expresses a sense of “ordinariness” about its presence within his community (Carvalho and Lewis 2003). For the author (and by default, his readers), crime has been a long time local problem, part of the neighborhood routine that has unfortunately lost its potential to scare. Instead, life adapts to living with violent crime as a component of everyday life (Carvalho and Lewis 2003). Again, without any reference to white affluent communities, the author evokes the norms created by the safety

discursive frame by allowing white residential space to set the normative standards and structure why exactly he is labeling his community as unsafe (Smith 1993).

Both types of reports work together to further reinforce less overt forms of white privilege and the mechanisms that facilitate the reproduction of those privileges. For example, a December 2012 article from the Arlington Heights *Daily Herald* included the following

But how else to describe the tragedy at Sandy Hook Elementary School?...Information cannot minimize the scope of such tragedy, but is our first refuge against the unimaginable....Tell us that this was done by some reckless mad men whose motives, however repulsive, we can at least conceive of. Tell us how families, parents, communities react. Tell us this is something that couldn't happen in our town, in our school, in our lives (Slusher 2012).

Here again, newspapers assert a frame that carries subtle racialized undertones. Expressions such as these, though seemingly neutral, make clear that safety is an assumed characteristic of white communities. This piece of text, however, goes further by demonstrating the ability of whites to separate themselves physically, ideologically, and psychologically from anything considered “dangerous,” particularly from violent crime. This is not necessarily a natural conclusion but is instead the result of discursive maneuvering that continues framing communities of color as dangerous with regard to race and crime, inevitably reinforcing the prevailing racial hierarchy. As Moore (2013b) notes, “Some forms of expression garner their meaning through their connection to the oppressive and often violent oppression of people of color, throughout the history of the

United States and to the contemporary racial social structure characterized by patterned societal inequality—or systemic racism.”<sup>8</sup>

By demonstrating that the heavy prominence of people of color in stories covering violent crime, these expressions result in white anxieties, hostilities, and beliefs about violent crime and people of color, thereby reinforcing the power and privilege afforded to whites and denied to people of color (Pager 2009; Entman and Rojecki 2000). The task is to convey that violent crime is a normative aspect of communities of color, not white suburban communities. In doing so, the white spatial imaginary allows for white assumptions that their communities are relatively safe when compared to communities of color—i.e. because violent crime is *supposed* to happen in Black and Latino communities, whites not living in these communities *are not supposed to worry* that violent crime will happen where they live (Heath 1984; Liska and Baccaglini 1990). Framing of safe and unsafe spaces, as such, serves a meaning-making function because it is through the construction and labeling of safe and dangerous places that the safety discursive frame protects the ability of whites to assume their neighborhoods are relatively safe from violent crime. Wildman and Davis (2000) note that a central “characteristic of [white] privilege is that members of privileged groups experience comfort of opting out of struggles against oppression if they so choose” (pg. 659; brackets added).

However, the occurrence of violent crime in a white community where whites are victims (such as the one the author is referring to above) shock the white spatial

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<sup>8</sup> Working manuscript, page number unavailable.

imaginary, ultimately giving whites the opportunity to make an even fiercer commitment to and justify controlling their white spaces. Incidents of violent crime in white neighborhoods cause white communities to reject anything that goes against the existing safety discursive frame because these incidents imply that crime is not an intrinsic component of communities of color. This form of discursive framing justifies “preventative measures” such as increased police; increased security at school and other public places; increased private security systems; and a continued commitment to the prison industrial complex (Huey 2011; Pager 2009). Similarly, it allows whites to think that their fear and fierce protection of white spaces are appropriate responses. The framing is deliberately worded to provoke discomfort and to generate negative emotion in order to persuade people who feel they are “at risk” of being victims of a violent crime to adopt a particular behavior—a behavior that is framed as being able to reduce the likelihood that white communities will have violent crime occur in their neighborhoods (Wolf 2007). As Wolf (2007) notes,

Risk...is grossly misunderstood. Research suggests that cognitive limitations, *skewed media coverage*, and misconstrued personal experience distort the proves of risk calculation, even among the well informed, and that ‘people systematically violate the principles of rational decision-making when judging probabilities, making or otherwise attempting to cope with probabilistic tasks’ (pg. 613; italics added).

Within this context, safety is not generally not understood as a matter of systemic racism but is instead discursively created to incorporate racialized images of criminality that that allow for mistaken assumptions and disconnect the white normative aspects of the safety discursive frame from the material and structural realities from which it results.

## V. CONCLUSION

Racialized constructions of safety and space continue to be the dominant paradigm by which discourse on violent crime and fear of criminal victimization is framed and structured. I have attempted to demonstrate how depictions of white communities as pure, homogenous, and calm spaces in newspaper discourse surrounding violent crime and fear permit and facilitate whites' tendency to link danger and violence to people of color and presume that they are largely safe from harm. Such depictions establish a false dichotomy that makes safety and people of color mutually exclusive categories. As this analysis indicates, safety, which implies the ability to manage both physical threats and the anxiety associated with such threats, is linked to the reproduction of the prevailing racial hierarchy and reproduce a conceptualization of safety that based on the safety discursive frame. These depictions not only reinforce existing stereotypes associating people of color with the dangerous side of the safety continuum, but also allow whites to evoke the institutional privilege to separate themselves from the everyday experiences people of color have with violent crime as afforded to them by white supremacy.

Throughout my analysis, I identified several ways in which the safety discursive frame is upheld and deployed in newspaper stories concerning crime and safety. It was rarely the case that white and communities of color were compared in a single story. Regardless, it was still evident that white communities set the normative standard of what was being framed as a safe, as portrayals of communities of color often included

several factors highlighting the deviant and dangerous nature of these communities. These texts incorporate white supremacist logic and make evident the continued salience of the contemporary racial hierarchy within the context of safety. Because safety is framed in terms of individual communities or neighborhoods, access to safety continues to be directly connected to institutional mechanisms facilitating white material and ideological privilege.

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## APPENDIX

<b>Table 7</b> <b>Population Composition by Race,</b> <b>Chicago IL</b>	
<b>Race</b>	<b>Percent</b>
White	45.0%
Black or African American	32.9%
Hispanic or Latino	28.9%
Two or More Races	2.7%
Some Other Race	13.4%
American Indian	0.5%

Source: United States Census Bureau ([http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/community\\_facts.xhtml](http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/community_facts.xhtml))

<b>Table 8</b> <b>Crime in the United States by Metropolitan Statistical Area, 2011</b>									
Metropolitan Statistical Area	Counties/principal cities	Population	Murder and Non-Negligent Manslaughter	Forcible Rape	Robbery	Aggravated Assault	Burglary	Larceny-Theft	Motor Vehicle Theft
Chicago-Joliet-Naperville, IL <sup>2</sup>	City of Chicago, IL <sup>2</sup>	9,491,301	431		13,975	12,408	26,420	72,373	19,446
	City of Joliet, IL	2,703,713	8	30	87	392	939	2,751	171
	City of Naperville, IL	147,877	2	4	24	82	300	1,768	42
	City of Elgin, IL	142,280	5	78	82	122	555	1,425	88
	City of Gary, IN	108,514	30	47	328	234	2,618	1,926	794
	City of Evanston, IL	80,704	3	4	76	95	403	1,669	54
	City of Arlington Heights, IL	74,710	2	5	17	24	170	892	21
	City of Schaumburg, IL	75,327							
	City of Skokie, IL	74,450	0	14	23	26	238	2,056	64
	City of Des Plaines, IL	64,979	2	13	39	87	325	1,323	75
	City of Hoffman Estates, IL	58,540	1	6	14	49	137	619	39
	Total area actually reporting	52,051	0	15	16	37	119	538	25
	Estimated total	95.7%	599		17,850	18,932	54,466	174,893	26,734
	Rate per 100,000 inhabitants	100.0%	609		18,100	19,478	56,203	181,610	27,138
			6.4		190.7	205.2	592.2	1,913.4	285.9

<sup>1</sup> Because of changes in the state/local agency's reporting practices, figures are not comparable to previous years' data.

<sup>2</sup> The data collection methodology for the offense of forcible rape used by Chicago, Illinois, and the Minnesota state UCR Program (with the exception of Minneapolis and St. Paul, Minnesota) does not comply with national UCR Program guidelines. Consequently, its figures for forcible rape and violent crime (of which forcible rape is a part) are not published in this table.

Source: The Federal Bureau of Investigation (<http://www.fbi.gov/about-us/cjis/ucr/crime-in-the-u.s/2011/crime-in-the-u.s.-2011/tables/table-6>)



Table 9 Newspaper Data		
Newspaper Name	Synopsis Summary	Count of Newspaper Used in Study
La Raza (Chicago)	"Founded in 1970, La Raza has been in the market for four decades providing Chicago Latinos with the best source of information on local, national and international news. As the #1 Spanish weekly newspaper in readership. La Raza prides itself in being the ultimate source for information and cultural connection for Chicago Hispanics." <sup>9</sup>	34
The Chicago Defender	"The Chicago Defender..founded in 1905, once heralded itself as "The World's Greatest Weekly." The newspaper was the nation's most influential black weekly newspaper by the advent of World War I, with more than two thirds of its readership base located outside of Chicago." <sup>10</sup> "For its part in encouraging the Great Migration, voicing the discontent of blacks, and revolutionizing black journalism, the Defender stands as one of the most powerful organs of social action in America." <sup>11</sup>	34
The Chicago Tribune	"Chicago Tribune, daily newspaper published in Chicago, one of the leading American newspapers and long the dominant, sometimes strident, voice of the Midwest....The paper gained in stature through its coverage of the American Civil War." <sup>12</sup>	38
The Daily Herald	"Suburban Chicago's largest daily newspaper. The newspaper provides a local perspective with local content for suburban Chicago area" and is the third largest newspaper in Illinois. <sup>13</sup>	49

<sup>9</sup> Source: <http://www.impremedia.net/laraza/>

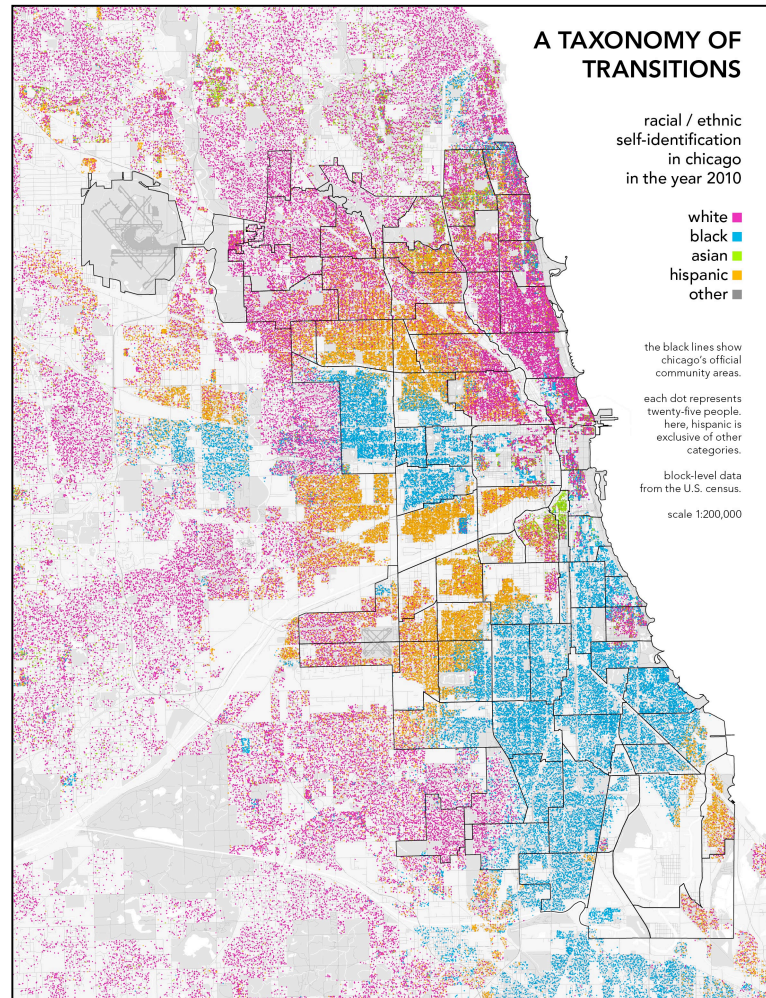
<sup>10</sup> Source: [http://www.pbs.org/blackpress/news\\_bios/defender.html](http://www.pbs.org/blackpress/news_bios/defender.html)

<sup>11</sup> Source: <http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/248.html>

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/110559/Chicago-Tribune>

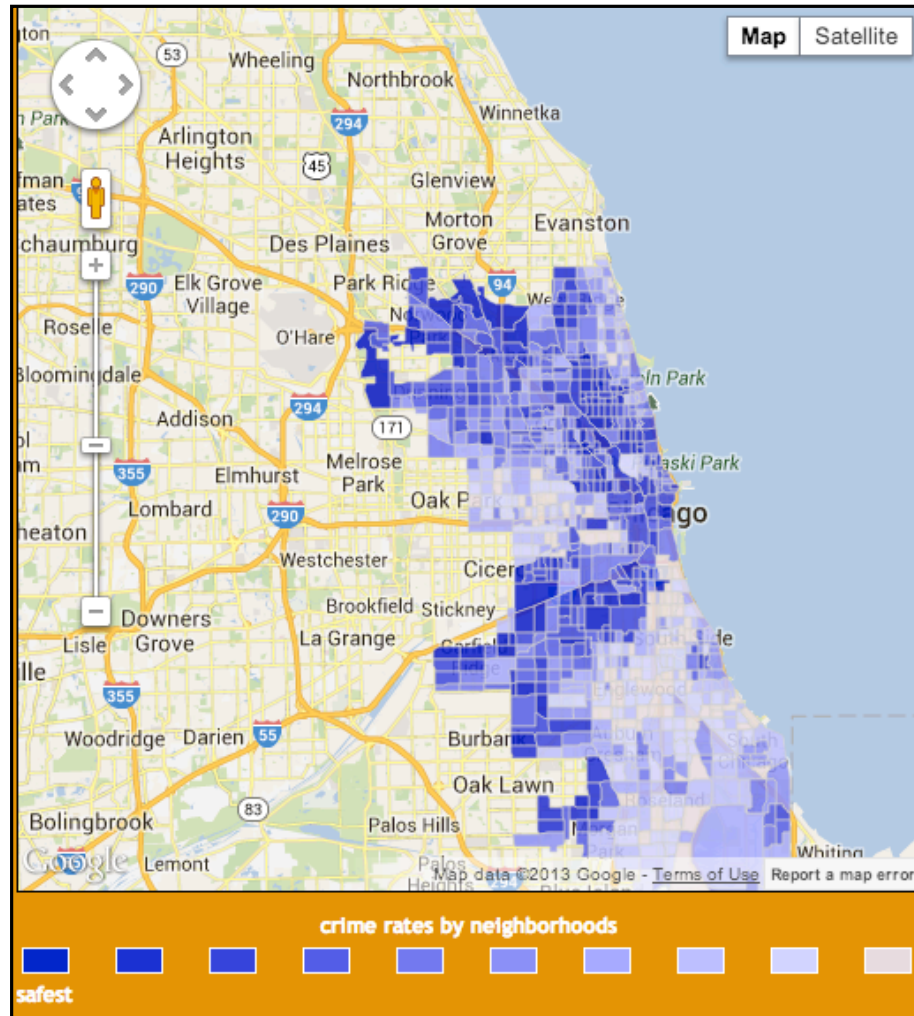
<sup>13</sup> Source: <http://www.dailyherald.com/>

**Figure 1: Residential Patterns by Racial Group - Greater Metropolitan Chicago**



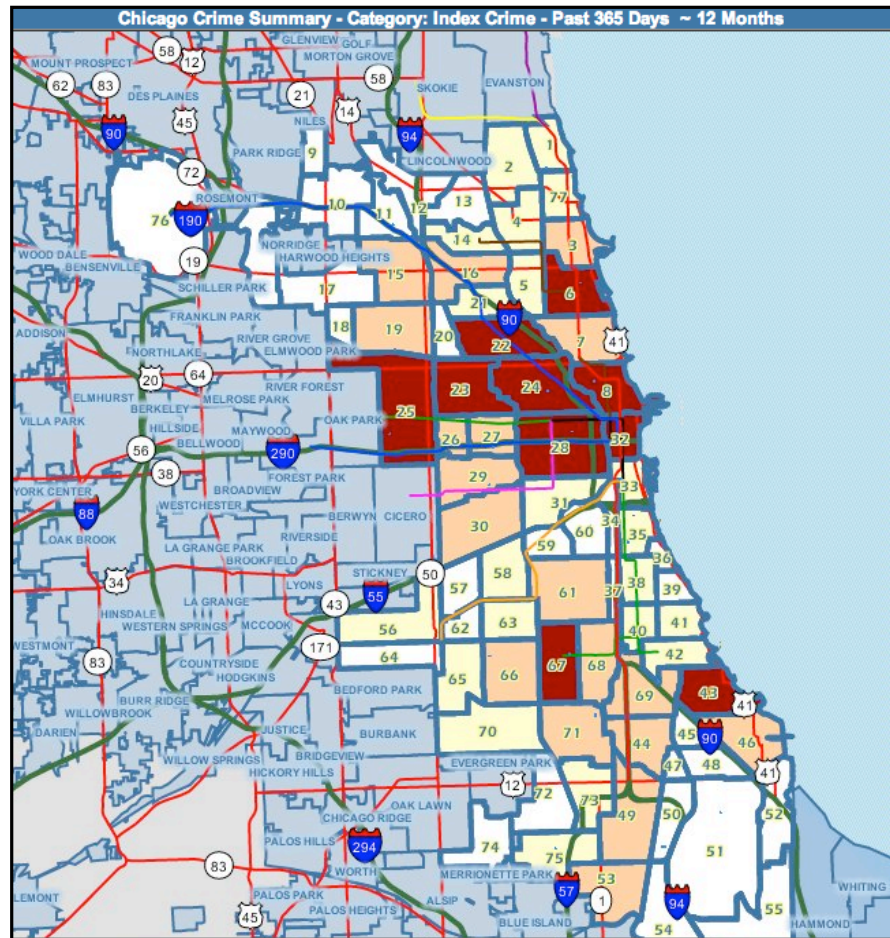
Source: Radical Cartography (<http://www.radicalcartography.net/index.html?chicagodots>)  
Accessed June 17, 2013

**Figure 2: Safety and Crime Rates of Chicago Neighborhoods**



Source: Neighborhood Scout (<http://www.neighborhoodscout.com/il/chicago/crime/>). Accessed June 17, 2013

**Figure 3: Crime Rates of Chicago Neighborhoods**



Crime Count by Community	
	95-845
	846-1708
	1709-3219
	3220-6755

Source: CLEARMAP Chicago Police Department. ([http://gis.chicagopolice.org/CLEARMap\\_crime\\_sums/startPage.htm](http://gis.chicagopolice.org/CLEARMap_crime_sums/startPage.htm)). Accessed June 17, 2011